(b) whether Shri Jaswant Singh, the special envoy of the Prime Minister also had meetings with Foreign Ministers of different ASEAN countries, to explain and clarify India's concerns, including those of Russia, China, Japan, UK and USA (Secretary of State); if so, what were their respective responses in this regard; and

(c) what was Government's overall assessment of the ASEAN members and talks relating to India's N-Tests?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) Laos, Singapore and Vietnam were among the countries which supported India's stand that the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) should be consistent and view India's nuclear tests from the perspective of the ARF's own responses on this issue, when during 1995-96 other ARF members had conducted nuclear tests.

(b) Shri Jaswant Singh, leader of the Indian delegation, held constructive discussions with Foreign Ministers of ASEAN countries, Russia, China, Japan, UK and USA. Our bilateral and multilateral interaction in the ASEAN and ARF meetings is aimed at leading to a better appreciation of measures taken by India to address international and regional security concerns. Russian Foreign Minister Mr. Primakov reiterated the importance of continued dialogue between India and Russia on all issues and said that Russia was mindful of its close ties with India. Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan reiterated China's historic commitment to good neighbourly and friendly relations with India and stated that recent events and remarks had hurt the feelings of the Chinese people. Shri Jaswant Singh responded that India's valid concerns could not be ignored but ought to be addressed substantively. Japan's State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Masahiko Koumura reiterated Japan's position on nuclear tests and clarified that measures taken by Japan were not meant to contract bilateral relations. The US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright expressed satisfaction with the status of the bilateral dialogue with India and described as positive recent measures announced by India.

(c) India's participation in the Fifty ASEAN Regional Forum provided an opportunity to clarify our policy on nuclear disarmament in the context of the nuclear tests conducted last May. It also demonstrated our continued engagement in the economic and political stability of the region and shared perceptions on regional and international developments. While the ARF Chairman's statement contained a paragraph on the nuclear tests in South Asia, from which we disassociated, we were able to develop a better overall understanding on the part of ASEAN countries of the rationale of our policy.

Hardships to Indian Pilgrims in Pakistan

2096. SHRI SATISHCHANDRA SITARAM PRADHAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of hardships and swindling of Indian pilgrims in Pakistan;

(b) whether the Indian embassy is appraised about this situation;

(c) whether Government have lodged protest against behaviour of Pakistani Officials with Indian pilgrims; and

(d) whether Government will consider providing transport arrangements through the Indian embassy in future?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (d) Visits of Indian and Pakistani pilgrims to religious shrines in each other's country are governed by the bilateral Protocol on Visits of Religious Shrines of 1974. During the visits, arrangements for transport, board and lodging are generally made by the host Government.

Indian High Commission officials are deputed to accompany all Indian jathas visiting Pakistan in order to liaise with the local authorities and provide such assistance to the pilgrims as is required. Our Liaison Officers have reported that Pakistani authorities often permit and encourage anti-Indian elements to undertake hostile anti-India propaganda during these visits. Such propaganda and harassment hurts the religious sensibilities of the pilgrims. In some instances, Indian pilgrims also have faced difficulties in respect of board, lodging

and transportation. In all these cases, Government have lodged protests against Pakistani actions and have urged Pakistan to fulfil its commitments under the provisions of the bilateral protocol. This demand was reiterated during discussions between the two countries on Fridendly Exchanges in Various Fields held in Delhi on 13th November 1998.

Statement of Dalai Lama Regarding Autonomy for Tibet

2097. KUMARI NIRMALA DESHPANDE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that H.H. the Dalai Lama has stated that he is seeking autonomy for Tibet, as a part of China; and

(b) if so, whether India is ready to offer its good offices to facilitate the process of dialogue between the Government of People's Republic of China and H.H. The Dalai Lama?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) According to reports available with Government, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in a statement in Washington on November 10, 1998, stated, "I am not seeking independence for Tibet, nor do my actions seek its separation from the People's Republic of China. I am for autonomy, genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people to preserve their distinct identity and way of life."

(b) According to reports, there are some prospects of negotiations between Government of China and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We would welcome such a process.

News-Item Regarding Pok Group Seeking Support

2098. SHRI AMAR SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item appearing in the Pioneer dated 18th November, 1998, under the heading 'POK group seeks Indian support';

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) Government's reaction in regard thereto?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (c) Government are aware of the plight of the people in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and of the existence of popular sentiment among them against Pakistan's continued illegal and forcible occupation of this territory, which is a part of the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir. During discussions of 17th October 1998, on Jammu and Kashmir, which were held as part of the composite dialogue process, Government called upon Pakistan to ensure that the people of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir are allowed in full measure their basic and fundamental rights.

Meeting of India-EU

2099. SHRI SOLIPETA RAMACHANDRA REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a ministerial meeting of the India-European Union Troika was held recently to discuss the relationship between the two sides; and

(b) if so, the issues specifically discussed and conclusions arrived at?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir. The 11th India-EU Troika Ministerial Meeting was held in New Delhi on November 13, 1998.

(b) The two sides reviewed the progress of bilateral relations. A wide range of issues, including those relating to the environment, the global financial crisis, international cooperation to combat terrorism organised crime and drug trafficking and developments in Asia and Europe were also discussed.

The two sides identified a number of fora and initiatives to take their dialogue forward. These include: continued Senior Official Meetings, the reinforcement of their dialogue on environment issues, and interchanges between European and Indian think tanks. Both sides expressed the need for an intensified high level economic dialogue to discuss economic, trade and financial matters. It was agreed that consultations on various bilateral and multilateral issues would be continued.